

3 per round, strong answer written first

A structured question has 3 properties: every candidate gets it, it feeds 1 scorecard line, and a strong answer to it is written before the first interview. This sheet is the order to write one in, the 4 worked examples, and the scoring line that survives a debrief.

1. The order to write a question in

STEP	DO THIS	OUTPUT
1	Take 1 scorecard line the round owns. No round owns more than 3.	The line
2	Write the strong answer first. What would the candidate say or do that proves the line?	The strong answer
3	Write the question that would produce that answer.	The question
4	Write 2 follow-ups. A rehearsed answer runs out inside 2; a real one gets more specific.	The follow-ups
5	If you cannot write the strong answer, the question measures taste. Go back to step 1.	A question that is ready

2. The 4 worked examples

LINE	STRONG ANSWER	QUESTION	FOLLOW-UPS
Reasons about failure	Names what happens when the downstream service gets slow.	"Here is the design. Where does it break first under load?"	"What would you watch to know it broke?" · "What would you cut with half the time?"
Writes code others can change	Explains why the fix works and what it might break.	A small working service with a subtle bug, every tool allowed. "Why does the fix work?"	"What might it break?" · "What did the tool suggest that you rejected?"
Decomposes an unfamiliar problem	Names the constraint before proposing anything. At staff level: says what not to build.	One problem with clear constraints. "What would you cut with half the time?"	"What did you assume?" · "What would change your design?"
Can disagree without stalling	A real example, with what changed their position.	"Give me a real example where you changed position."	"What changed it?" · "What did the other person say?"

The same 3 questions for every level; the written bar moves with it.

3. The round, 60 minutes

MINUTES	WHAT
0 to 15	Question 1, with its 2 follow-ups
15 to 30	Question 2, with its 2 follow-ups
30 to 45	Question 3, with its 2 follow-ups
45 to 60	The candidate's own questions

4. Your 3 questions for this round

Round: _____ Interviewer: _____ Level: _____

Q	LINE	STRONG ANSWER	QUESTION	2 FOLLOW-UPS
1				
2				
3				

5. The scoring line, 3 parts

Each answer is scored against the strong answer, in writing, alone, before anyone talks.

PART	EXAMPLE
What the candidate did	"Could not explain why the retry count was 3."
What you concluded	"Did not write the fix, or did not understand it."
What you asked to test it	"Asked twice, in different ways."

That line survives a debrief. "Some concerns about depth" survives nothing.

6. Once a year

- ☐ Give the same 3 questions to 2 interviewers and a recording. Where their scores differ, the bar still lives in people's heads.
- ☐ A question that never produced its own evidence in 10 candidates gets rewritten.
- ☐ Rotate 2 or 3 versions of the coding exercise. Keep the behavioural prompts; they cannot leak.